IN THE CLAIMS:

Please amend claims 1, 5, 8 and 10, and please renumber claims 10-12 as claims 32-34, as shown below, in which deleted terms are shown with strikethrough or double brackets and added terms are shown with underscoring. This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application.

1. (Currently amended) A method of manufacturing a hollow cylindrical body, comprising the steps of:

bringing end faces of a plate material, the plate material having fingers projecting from corners along a joining direction, into abutment against each other to form protrusions projecting along the joining direction with end faces of the fingers, and also to form a hollow cylindrical body;

gripping said protrusions by a gripping member;

while the protrusions are gripped in place, friction-stir-welding abutting regions of the end faces of the plate material to join the end faces to each other, thereby forming a hollow cylindrical body having said protrusions; and

removing said protrusions;

wherein said end faces of the plate material are friction-stir-welded such that said abutting region is devoid of a formation of swellings.

2. (Previously presented) A method of manufacturing a hollow cylindrical body according to claim 1, wherein said hollow cylindrical body having said protrusions is pressed from a side of an outer circumferential wall surface thereof when the abutting regions are friction-stir-welded.

3. (Previously presented) A method of manufacturing a hollow cylindrical body according to claim 1, wherein the abutting regions are friction-stir-welded while said hollow cylindrical body is inclined with respect to a horizontal direction.

4. (Previously presented) A method of manufacturing a hollow cylindrical body according to claim 1, wherein a wheel rim that is joined to a wheel disk to produce a vehicular wheel is manufactured as said hollow cylindrical body.

5. (Currently amended) A friction stir welding process for bringing a first end face and a second end face of a metal workpiece into abutment against each other, and thereafter joining said first end face and said second end face to each other with a rotating friction stir welding tool,

wherein when a first end having said first end face is present on a retreating side and a second end having said second end face is present on an advancing side, a workpiece plunging member having a substantially circular cross section, which is disposed on a tip end of said friction stir welding tool, is plunged with a central region thereof being displaced from a boundary line between said first end face and said second end face to said second end within a range equal to or smaller than the radius of the workpiece plunging member; wherein a minimum value of displacement of said workpiece plunging member in said range is greater than 0.

6. (Previously presented) A friction stir welding process according to claim 5, wherein said workpiece plunging member is displaced from said boundary line to said second end by a distance equal to or smaller than one-half of the radius of the workpiece plunging member.

7. (Original) A friction stir welding process according to claim 5, wherein a workpiece having said first end face and a workpiece having said second end face are separate from each other and are made of a chief component comprising the same metal.

8. (Currently amended) A friction stir welding process for bringing a first end face and a second end face of a metal workpiece having a curved surface into abutment against each other to form abutting regions, and then friction-stir-welding the abutting regions to join said end faces to each other, wherein

said first end face and said second end face have burrs projecting in a thickness direction of said metal workpiece, and sags projecting in a direction transverse to said thickness direction;

when said abutting regions are formed, said sags of said first end face and said second end face are disposed in confronting relation to each other and positioned on a surface of an outer circumferential wall ~~surface~~ of said curved surface, and said burrs are positioned on a surface of an inner circumferential wall ~~surface~~ of said curved surface; wherein said outer circumferential wall is longer than the inner circumferential wall; and

when the abutting regions are friction-stir-welded, a plunging member of a friction stir welding tool is plunged into the outer circumferential wall surface on which said sags are disposed in confronting relation to each other, and thereafter said friction stir welding tool is moved to scan said abutting regions.

9. (Previously presented) A friction stir welding process according to claim 8, wherein said first end face and said second end face are present on the same metal workpiece, and said abutting regions are provided by curving said metal workpiece to bring said first end face and

said second end face into abutment against each other.

[[10]] 32. (Currently amended) A method of manufacturing a hollow cylindrical body according to claim 1, wherein the step of said friction-stir-welding comprises a method step of plunging portions of the plate material around said end faces thereof along the abutment therebetween with a workpiece plunging member having a substantially circular cross section; and wherein said workpiece plunging member is displaced from a boundary line between said end faces to one of ends of said plate material within a range less than or equal to a radius of the workpiece plunging member; wherein a minimum value of displacement of said workpiece plunging member in said range is greater than 0.

[[11]] 33. (Currently amended) A friction stir welding process according to claim 5, wherein each of said first and second end faces of the metal workpiece comprise a finger, which forms protrusions along a joining direction of said first and second end faces when said first and second end faces are brought into said abutment.

[[12]] 34. (Currently amended) A friction stir welding process for bringing a first end face and a second end face of a metal workpiece according to claim 8, wherein each of said first and second end faces of the metal workpiece comprise a finger, which forms protrusions along a joining direction of said first and second end faces when said first and second end faces are brought into said abutment.